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Several timber rattlesnakes were seized in a recent undercover investigation.
Staff photo

Two-year law enforcement covert operation puts dent in illegal reptile trade

Conservation officers arrested 10 people last Thursday, July 10, cited an additional person, seized more than 125 venomous snakes and other reptiles, and expect to issue more than 700 charges following a nearly two-year undercover investigation focusing on the illegal possession, importation and buying and selling of reptiles in Kentucky.

Forty-four conservation officers served arrest warrants in Bell, Harlan, Madison, Letcher and Boone counties. Officers also seized illegal western diamondback rattlesnakes, timber rattlesnakes, cottonmouth water moccasins, northern and southern copperheads, cobras, great basin rattlesnakes, a gaboon viper, a puff adder and an alligator.

Undercover officers purchased more than 200 illegal reptiles during the nearly two-year investigation code named "Twice Shy" that included Internet sales. Officers levied 416 charges, and expect to issue at least 300 more charges as the investigation



Conservation officers Chris Meadows, Sgt. Jason Bolton, Ray Lawson and Bryan Bowling show containers holding some of the 74 illegal snakes they seized after a two-year undercover operation focusing on the illegal buying, selling, and possessing of reptiles. *Staff photo*

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I & E Assistant Director Jay Webb retiring after 34 years at KDFWR

Assistant Director Jay Webb of the I&E Division recently announced his retirement at the end of July, following nearly 34 years of service to the department. "Kentucky Fish and Wildlife is like family," he said. "Most of my good friends are department employees, and I'm going to miss that camaraderie."



In more recent times
Staff photo

"But," he added, "I'll get used to sleeping late."

Webb started his career as a wildlife conservation education supervisor for the Seventh District, based in Hazard. He later transferred to Campbell County, and became assistant director in charge of education programs about 10 years ago.

Webb's fondest memories involve his hunting and fishing mentors at the department who became his good friends. More than 30 years ago, Webb and three other co-workers started the tradition of an annual fishing trip. It's a tradition that continues today.

Whoever catches the biggest fish on one of these trips writes their name and the weight of the fish on a ratty old boot. This trophy, a diary of days past, is

now in the possession of another angler. Webb will soon have more time for fishing – and increase his chances of winning it back.



Jay in the 1970s
Staff photo

Barnard, Burford promoted

Jim Barnard will be joining the Landowner Incentives Program as a Technician assisting in the implementing of practices benefiting species-at-risk. Jim has worked as a seasonal for the department and has experience with invasive exotic removal, prescribed fire and many wildlife management practices. Congratulations, Jim!

Wildlife Diversity Biologist Laura Burford will serve as the I&E Division's

new assistant director in charge of summer camps, hunter education, CEPLs, aquatic education, archery in the schools and the AWAKE program.

Burford replaces Jay Webb, who is retiring at the end of the month. "Laura has excellent communications skills and a lifelong interest in conservation education," said I&E Division Director Tim Slone. "As a wildlife biologist, she understands the resources of our state. She also brings a

new and different outlook to the job."

Burford earned her bachelor's degree in zoology and her master's degree in forestry from the University of Kentucky. A 14-year veteran of Kentucky Fish and Wildlife, she headed the peregrine falcon reintroduction program and most recently served as liaison between the Wildlife and I&E Divisions. Burford lives on a Scott County farm with her husband and two sons. Congratulations, Laura!

Fish hatcheries and transportation personnel in high gear

Minor Clark and Pfeiffer Fish Hatcheries are the Commonwealth's only state-owned fish hatcheries providing fish for stocking throughout Kentucky.

While the calendar year is now half over, personnel at both hatcheries, in addition to the transportation staff, have been extremely busy spawning, rearing, and stocking fish.

Below is a summary of the number of fish that have been stocked as of June 1, 2008.

Walleye

Nearly 2 million Lake Erie strain walleye fingerlings were stocked in 7 different lakes and the Ohio River. In addition, over 2 million Lake Erie strain fry were stocked into Lake Cumberland and the Licking River.

Woods Creek Lake and the upper Barren River were stocked with over 85,000 native strain walleye fingerlings. An additional 31,500 native strain walleye fry were also stocked in the Upper Barren River as part of an attempt to restore this

species in the river.

Sauger

The Kentucky River, from Pool 4 up to and including the three forks, was stocked with 200,000 fingerling sauger. Sauger fry (150,000) were also stocked in Pool 3 of the river.

Catfish

Over 46,000 8-inch channel catfish were stocked in 12 different lakes across the state. An additional 87,000 channel catfish ranging from 5-6 inches were stocked in Pool 2 and 3 of the Kentucky River. Channel (560,000) and blue (144,000) catfish fry were also stocked in Pool 3 of the river.

Trout

A total of 74,000 rainbow trout

were stocked in 14 different tailwaters, with an additional 61,000 rainbow trout stocked in streams throughout Kentucky. Over 71,000 rainbow trout were also stocked in 33 different lakes across the state. Brown trout were stocked in 7 different streams (5,300) and 2 tailwaters (56,500). A complete list of the waters stocked with trout can be found in our 2008 Kentucky Fishing and Boating Guide.

Muskie

The Kentucky and Licking rivers received over 250,000 muskie fry.

Lake Sturgeon

The upper Cumberland River was stocked with 243 lake sturgeon (10 inches in length) as part of a long term lake sturgeon restoration project.

Fisheries Division employees Kenny Atha, Ed Davis and Mike Atha handle catfish during a recent pond stocking. *Staff photo*



Bear research continues as Kentucky prepares for first bear season

Since May 19, 2008, University of Kentucky (UK) researchers and KDFWR personnel have captured 15 (10 male and five female) bears. The majority of trapping has occurred to date on Hensley-Pine Mountain WMA and surrounding areas along Pine Mountain.

All captured bears have been fitted with radio collars and we currently have 15 individuals equipped with GPS collars and 3 with standard VHF receivers. Those radio-collared animals will provide valuable data regarding the movements and use of habitats by bears in eastern Kentucky.

Likewise, data collected from GPS collars will enable detailed analyses of movement patterns by nuisance animals, and the effects of aversive conditioning and relocation on those patterns. Trapping will continue throughout the summer in an effort to deploy as many radio collars as possible.

The month of June also brought forth the unanimous decision by the Wildlife Commission to proceed with plans for a black bear season in Kentucky.

On June 13, Commission members voted for a 2009 quota hunt, which will mark the first bear season in Kentucky's modern history. The 2-day hunt will occur the third weekend in December and be open to any person that purchases a \$30.00 bear permit.

The use of bait and hounds for taking bears shall be prohibited, except that leashed dogs may be used to track a wounded bear. Bears may be taken using archery or crossbow equipment, muzzle-loaders and modern firearms. The annual bag limit shall be one bear per hunter.

There will be a quota of 10 bears, or 5 females, whichever limit is reached first. All bears

must be immediately telechecked and transported to a KDFWR check station so that pertinent data may be collected. All hunters will be required to call KDFWR after 9:00 pm the first day to see if the quota has been reached. The season will be closed once the quota has been reached.

Bears may only be harvested in Harlan, Letcher and Pike counties. Additionally, bear hunting will be prohibited on an



Female bear captured by researchers on Hensley-Pine Mountain WMA.
Jayson Plaxico photo

18,421-acre tract that contains Hensley-Pine Mountain WMA, Kingdom Come State Park and surrounding areas.

Telemetry data clearly indicate that this area is important denning habitat for female bears along Pine Mountain. Limiting human disturbance in that area will therefore help maximize reproductive success and ensure continued population growth.

Quick action by Rose and Newman nab Curtis Lloyd WMA vandals

Fifth District Lt. Bobby Newman and Curtis Gates Lloyd Wildlife Management Area foreman Paul Rose recently received a confession from a person who vandalized the tubed shooting range at the Lloyd WMA in Grant County.

Based on a tip from a sportsman who had used the range, Paul was surveilling from a hidden vantage point near the range when he observed a vehicle that matched the description of one of the offenders at the range.

Paul called Lt. Newman, who immediately responded and approached the

violin. He confessed and implicated a friend – another violator.

Grant County District Court exacted damages and court costs from each of the two vandals for the offenses.

Lloyd WMA lies in populous northern Kentucky and receives heavy public use because of its location as well as its extensive shooting facilities.

Law Enforcement assistance is key to keeping the ranges safe and serviceable for sportsmen.

Kudos to Bobby and Paul for their exemplary work on this case!

Biologists capture, measure and release fish, like this male bluegill and redear sunfish, during population sampling of farm ponds. *Staff photo*



Rising demand for the farm pond management program

The private farm pond technical guidance program provides pond owners with technical advice on how to properly plan, build, and manage the sport fishery resource in their pond.

This program is one of the longest running services offered to the public by the Fisheries Division and is provided free of charge to pond owners, as well as those landowners interested in constructing a pond. Even though most of these ponds are located on private lands, many of the landowners allow public fishing access.

Interested landowners can take part in this service simply by contacting their local district fisheries biologist. Once contacted, the biologist may schedule an on-site visit which may include a short electrofishing sample, test seining, and water quality analysis.

In some situations, landowner questions and problems can be handled over the telephone, without the need for a site visit. Once a problem has been defined, the fisheries biologist will then make recommendations on how to solve the problem.

Upon completion of the technical guidance site visit or phone call, the landowner is given a specific management

plan tailored to solve the problem and meet their goals and expectations.

In 2007, 348 technical guidance site visits were conducted throughout the Commonwealth, with an additional 1,300 technical guidance problems handled over the telephone and through e-mail.

The demand for the technical guidance program has increased annually for the past several years. In 2005, 288 technical guidance site visits were conducted, while 302 technical guidance visits were conducted in 2006.

The most common technical guidance problems encountered are unbalanced fish populations, excessive aquatic plant growth, lack of fish habitat, and the presence of undesirable fish species.

Landowners interested in participat-

ing in the Fisheries Division's Technical Guidance Program are encouraged to contact their local district fisheries biologist to discuss their concerns and to determine if an on-site visit is needed.



Central Fisheries District employees conduct a technical guidance visit on a Jefferson County pond. *Rick Hill photo*

"Covert," continued

continues.

"This was a well-conducted and well-documented investigation that has put those who would engage in the illegal selling and buying of any wildlife in Kentucky on notice that they are subject to arrest and prosecution," said Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Director of Law Enforcement Colonel Bob Milligan. "It is disturbing to me that individuals would keep such dangerous wildlife in their homes and in neighborhoods where they put their families, visitors and neighbors at such high risk."

- Gregory James Coots, 36, of Middlesboro was arrested and faces more than 150 charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing wildlife. Officers seized 74 snakes from his Middlesboro home, among them, 42 copperheads, 11 timber rattlesnakes, 13 cottonmouth water moccasins, a western diamondback rattlesnake, two cobras and a puff adder.
- Zechariah Johnson, 21, of Evarts in Harlan County faces at least 24 counts of illegally buying, selling and possessing venomous snakes. His father, Ricky Johnson, 55, also of Evarts faces at least 59 charges. Officers seized 24 timber rattlesnakes and copperheads from the residence.
- Verlin Ray Short, 36, of Mayking in Letcher County, was arrested and faces at least 78 charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing venomous snakes. Officers seized 34 venomous snakes, including a western diamondback rattlesnake, a great basin rattlesnake, timber rattlesnakes and northern and southern copperheads.
- Roger Leo Day, 33, of Harlan, was arrested and faces six charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing wildlife.
- Jerrod Allen, 21, of Berea, was arrested and faces at least nine charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing wildlife.
- Brian Fryer, 30, of Berea, was arrested and faces at least 46 charges of illegally selling, buying and possessing wildlife.



Gary Bailey (in May of 2008) with the 1946 Chevy truck he renovated. *Jay Webb photo*

Camp Webb Superintendent Gary Bailey is ill

The I&E Division is saddened to report that Camp Webb Superintendent Gary Bailey is gravely ill. "Our thoughts and prayers are with Gary and his family right now," said I&E Division Director Tim Slone.

Under Bailey's direction, Camp Webb has emerged as a premier facility. "Gary's done a wonderful job of managing the camp and keeping it in tip-top shape," said Jay Webb, assistant director of I&E. "It's become the place where everyone wants to

go to hold a meeting."

Bailey not only keeps the camp within its budget, but he finds innovative ways to improve the facilities. Bailey and his employees have renovated two office buildings, rebuilt four camper cabins from the foundation up and recently partnered with the National Wild Turkey Federation to build a handicapped-accessible bathhouse.

"Gary always shows a lot of initiative," Webb said. "He finds ways to get things done."

Officers seized an illegal firearm as well.

- Michael Peterson, 39, of Florence, was arrested and faces at least 21 charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing wildlife. Officers seized an albino cobra, and the frozen remains of a gaboon viper and copperheads.
- John Rowland, 46, of Berea was arrested and faces two charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing wildlife. His son,

Joel Rowland, 18, of Berea also was arrested and faces the same charges.

- William R. Howard, 56, of Harlan, was cited and faces three charges of illegally possessing wildlife and at least 35 charges of transporting wildlife without a permit.

Each charge of illegally buying, selling or possessing wildlife is a misdemeanor offense carrying a maximum penalty of one-year imprisonment and a \$1,000 fine.



Despite higher fees, the Farm Pond Stocking Program is still a great deal. *Staff photo*

New fee structure for the Farm Pond Stocking Program

The Farm Pond Stocking Program provides sport fish to private pond owners to stock newly constructed or recently renovated ponds.

A recent survey of the opinions and attitudes of private farm pond owners in Kentucky found that 80 percent of pond owners had stocked their waters with fish from the Farm Pond Stocking Program. Of those individuals who had stocked their pond with these fish, 78 percent were very satisfied with the quality of the fish that they received from the Department.

Roughly 82 percent of pond owners who responded to this survey rated the Farm Pond Stocking Program very important as a public service provided by the Department.

The Farm Pond Stocking Program provides largemouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish. Largemouth bass are stocked at 120 fish/acre, bluegill are stocked at 400 fish/acre, and channel catfish are stocked at 50 fish/acre.

At the time of stocking, largemouth bass and bluegill are less than 1 inch in length while the channel catfish average about 1.5 inches. Bluegill and channel catfish are stocked in October and the largemouth bass are stocked the following May.

Prior to September 2007, the fee to stock a pond was \$25 regardless of the size of the pond being stocked. This same stocking rate would cost a pond or lake owner roughly \$250 - \$350 per acre if the fish were obtained from a private fish dealer.

Beginning September 1, 2007, the fee structure changed to help recover transportation and fish production costs and is now based upon the acreage of the pond being stocked. Ponds less than 1.4 acres are charged \$75, while ponds that are 1.5 - 3.0 acres are charged \$200.

Ponds that are greater than 3.0 acres are charged \$200 plus \$150 per additional acre (pro rated at ¼ acre intervals). Hence a 4.5 acre pond will cost \$425 to stock. Pond owners wanting to take part in this program are to submit an application to the Department prior to September 1.

In 2007, more than 70,000 largemouth bass, 30,000 channel catfish, and 238,000 bluegill were provided by the Department to private pond owners.

Despite the increase in the fee structure, private pond owners still consider this program very important.

Seventy-nine percent of private pond owners who responded to the survey stated this program was worthwhile enough to

Golf scramble raises \$8,000 for camp scholarships

The fourth annual Kyle Houchin Memorial Golf Scramble raised \$8,000 recently for the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Foundation, making it the most successful year so far. The money will be used to provide scholarships for kids to attend conservation camp.

The Shelby County event is held each spring at Weissinger Hills Golf Course in memory of avid hunter and angler Kyle Houchin, who died in a car accident at the age of 21.

"I could hardly keep him in school for hunting and fishing. He always really loved it," said father Tom Houchin. "We thought, what better fit than to do this scholarship for these kids to go to camp?"

The event has grown financially every year through corporate and individual sponsors and a silent auction. Kentucky Fish and Wildlife donated two Rick Hill prints this year to help raise money through the auction.

"We invite people to come even if they don't play golf," said Houchin. In addition to the silent auction, non-golfers can support the event by sponsoring a golf hole, one of the scramble's biggest fund-raisers. Banners are placed at the golf course to thank the event's largest corporate sponsors.

In addition to the Houchin family, the event is made possible through the hard work of the Kyle Houchin Wildlife Memorial Committee.

pay more than the \$25 fee for this service. When asked how much they would be willing to pay, the majority (60%) stated that they would be willing to pay up to \$100 per acre.

Even with this new fee structure, the cost to stock a pond is still considerably less than if fish were obtained from a private fish dealer.



A bird dog demonstration was eagerly received at Camp Webb. Jack Lee photo

Bird dogs at camp

Reconnecting today's youth to hunting and the outdoors is no easy task. Many kids may only shoot at a bird on a television screen using the latest video game technology and never get the chance to go outside for a day in the field.

Many kids simply don't get the opportunity to learn about and pursue outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and shooting sports.

KDFWR's Small Game Program recently partnered with Information and Education Division staff at Camp Webb to initiate a new program for campers-working bird dogs at camp.

Quail Forever members Mike Cole and Steve Cole played a major role in the success of the new program. With help from their dogs, Cooper and Deuce, Mike

and Steve volunteered their time (and gas!) to visit the camp in an effort to get campers excited about bird dogs and bird hunting.

The program was treated as a voluntary activity during evening free time and every camper gave up their free time to watch Cooper and Deuce in action. "Personally, I think this was one of the best, most interesting things we've done at camp for a long time," said Camp Webb Conservation Education Program Leader J.J. Baker.

The handlers plan to return to Camp Webb several times before the end of camp season. Given the positive response from the project, we hope to expand the program to include all three camps next summer.

Wildlife Division surpasses two Strategic Plan goals

Wildlife Division staff have recently achieved the following 2 items in the Strategic Plan:

- Goal I, Strategic Objective 2g reads:
Convert at least 20,000 acres of fescue on private lands by the end of FY 2012.

This year, Wildlife Division staff have worked with private landowners to convert a total of 36,935 acres, including 911 acres in the HIP, 500 acres in CRP, 35,000 acres in the Green River CREP, and 524 acres in WHIP. This greatly exceeds our 2012 goal.

Our next mission is to ensure these converted acres continue to provide quality wildlife habitat into the future.

- Goal I, Strategic Objective 3a reads:
Increase the acreage enrolled in the Green River CREP by 25% by the end of FY 2008.

We have successfully hired additional staff this year in the Green River CREP area, and along with our partners at USDA we have greatly increased enrollment into the program.

Through the first 5.5 years of the program we enrolled 11,277 acres into the Green River CREP. However, this year we have enrolled 74,123 acres into the program for an overall enrollment of 85,408 acres.

This has resulted in a 657 % increase by the end of FY 2008. It is likely by the end of FY 2009 the program will be fully enrolled at 99,500 acres.

This program has been so successful that we and our CREP partners are now considering asking the Governor and USDA to add additional acres to the program.